

The Village Setting

Agricultural 37

experts are rightly questioning some of the obvious economic difficulties of trying to farm several scattered strips from a village home base, but they sometimes forget the social efficiencies found in a village in contrast to the isolated farmstead. Some of this social efficiency becomes apparent as soon as one arrives in the *plateia*, the village square.

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THE PLATEIA

Any visitor from outside is expected by the villagers to make his identity and business known as soon as possible, not to conform to any legal or police requirements but to satisfy the lively, usually friendly village curiosity. The *plateia* is the stage for this performance. Upon entering the village, one heads toward the most imposing coffeehouse in the *plateia*. A reception committee springs apparently from nowhere in the person of the local village president or some other dignitary. By the time the coffeehouse is reached, the visitor becomes the honored guest and is asked what refreshment he prefers — coffee or something stronger. Meanwhile, four or five other men, who consider themselves important enough locally to display such forwardness, join the reception committee at the table. Others stand around to watch what the strangers do and to listen to the conversation. Such situations call to mind the observation of a traveler through the Balkans and Eastern Europe half a century ago, who pointed out that when the Russian or the Turk had no business to occupy him, he went home; but when the Greek or the Jew had nothing to do, he stood on the corner of the square hoping something would turn up.¹ After the newcomers have observed the formalities and explained the purpose of the visit, everyone can then sit back and relax to drink the sirupy coffee or to give one's throat a chance to cool after each swallow of the fiery *ouzo*. Only then can the visitor really devote his attention to what the people who pass through the square are doing or wearing.

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First there are the children, some of them startled as they suddenly see their reflection in the shiny chromium automobile bumper; other youngsters settle down to some simple game after the visitor becomes monopolized by the older people. Next comes a man carrying pottery jars to the fountain at the edge of the square, getting water for his coffeshop around the corner. Peasants on their way from the fields ride their carts through the square, with a spare horse used for plowing led along behind. The animals as well as the very small children shy away from the automobile. Women look from the windows of the nearby houses at the group at the tables under the trees in front of the coffeehouse, but only very few ever venture close enough to hear what the men are talking about. A bus from the city pulls in with a roar and a clatter and quickly becomes the center of attention.

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As the sights and sounds of the people and the animals become familiar,

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The Changing Life of the Shepherd

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covered with homemade blankets. The necessary water cask was also there. As we sat in front of the tent, we saw a scene of unusual beauty. The sun, setting in a red splash behind the Albanian mountains, was reflected in the Aaos River flowing in a small stream through its broad gravel bed; off to our right, the town of Konitsa spread like a jeweled fan up the hill. When we stood to warm ourselves at the fire, we saw a three-quarter moon rising behind the black mountain which towered just behind the tents, the moonlight on its patches of snow. The smoke of the campfire, the dogs barking, the puppies and lambs romping in the tent, the occasional neighing of the hobbled horses, made a scene that was distinct from the usual Greek evening landscape. It was incredibly different in time, too, from the atomic age, although in space only a score of miles from the Iron Curtain and twenty-eight flying hours from New York.

Berates' daughter, Vasilike, had been engaged for two years to a boy whom she had never seen but who was picked out for her by her father. As the father phrased it, "the word is given." At this point in the conversation, flustered and greatly embarrassed, Vasilike went into the neighboring tent to make some sirupy coffee. When we asked our host if his people had a dowry system, he grunted and said: "Ten years ago women took only their household equipment as a dowry; now they've started giving flocks as dowries. This accursed custom of the dowry has come up to us from the cities." Later, while we were sipping the coffee Vasilike brought, one of the shepherd boys came to play his flute for us. Because this was Saturday, the women two tents down the line had all washed their hair, with the exception of one little girl who was even then doing so in a small, shallow oven pan. The others had gotten to the stage of having their hair plaited. We could hear them at it, laughing and talking. But as the time dragged on, as darkness came down, and the sheep had not arrived, a nervousness became apparent in the camp. Everyone was marking time, waiting for the sheep.

At long last, the tension broke as we heard the flocks come nearer. They arrived at 9:30, and the available men, six in all, began the milking. A barricade of saddles, firewood, and thistles had already been made in which there was a small opening. The men seated themselves, three on a side, at the opening. The sheep were driven slowly up to the opening, and as a ewe came through one of the men would grab her by the hind leg and then proceed to milk her. Here, as elsewhere in Greece, the women never milked the sheep, nor the men the goats, although extra hands would have shortened considerably the tedious job that extended far into the night.

After the milking was well under way, Vasilike put a frying pan full of strained milk on the fire to boil. She then brought us a bowl of this warm, rich liquid to eat with bread and cheese. The bread had been purchased along the way and was paid for by cash from the milk sold en route. While

Woman's Work Is Never Done

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tice in particular the heavy concentration on cereals in the Greek diet in comparison with the more even distribution among other food groups in the American diet. The small proportion obtained from dairy products brings to mind a conversation with an official from Northern Greece, who noted that in a village near Kozane the cows were "about the size of goats," so small and unproductive were they. He told his secretary to arrange to have a good bull sent to the village to improve the stock and to announce to the people what he was about to do. But the women asked why.

"To give you bigger animals to work and to give you more milk."

"What will we do with the milk?"

"Drink it."

"Whoever heard of drinking cow's milk?"

There was no objection, of course, to drinking goat's or sheep's milk. This official went back to the director of agriculture for his region and said, "You hang a stone around your neck, and I'll hang one around mine. We've been here this long and haven't yet taught the people that they can drink cow's milk."

Thus food is more than a statistical table. We learn what is locally important when we hear a Greek village girl tell about the kind of food she has at home:

Throughout the year we eat bread, which is coarse, a little darker, and tastes much better than the bread in Athens. It is made of wheat flour from the grain grown by each family and milled in one of the seven watermills near the village. As a milling charge the miller will keep about one sixth. The flour is stored in a wooden box at home. When we make bread we mix the dough in a pottery bowl. At first, we may need to borrow or buy yeast from another family but then keep a little yeast for next time. We bake once a week in an outdoor oven; in the winter, if the weather is very bad, we use a little oven in the house. The outdoor oven is made of brick and is round. After we have built a fire from branches and gotten the oven very hot, we push the coals to the side and put the round loaves in between so that they will absorb the heat from the oven and the coals. We may also cook cakes or sweets in the oven.

Our people want bread all of the time when they are eating. We eat corn-bread only in case of emergency. We eat potatoes more than rice, usually serving the potatoes in a stew of meat and red sauce.

We eat much [notice her definition of "much"] meat, especially pork because we feed a pig until it reaches a hundred okas; we kill it, cut it up, and put the meat in receptacles after salting it. The pig is butchered around March and its meat lasts us for about a year, if we use some of it about twice a week. We eat more chicken than lamb; we don't use beef.

We eat a bean stew about three times a week except in the summer, at which time we eat green beans. We eat many vegetables and fruits in season. We dry figs for use during the year.

The daughter-in-law does most of the cooking and is apt to favor her father-in-law's appetite.

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Family

262 in-law's appetite. Our people don't spend much money on food, preferring to
[432] grow their own. If a person buys food at the market the others will become
envious of him because he has money "to spend on food."

264 Meal times are as follows when we are doing field work: breakfast, 6 to 7
A.M. at which time we eat bread, cheese, olives, and sometimes eggs; at 10
A.M. there is a break for a snack; lunch is at 1 P.M. and supper about 8:30 P.M.

272 We drink tea every day, this being what we call "mountain tea" (*tsai tou*
vounou), made from a wild flower which we gather.

262 Most of the oils and fats the Greeks use, come from olives rather than
[146] from animal products. Indeed, of the proteins eaten by Greeks, including
the city as well as the rural Greek, only 19 percent is animal protein in com-
parison with 66 percent in the United States. As one study observed:

[235] The majority of families in the villages have from 4 to 8 hens, each of which
[855] lays about 60 eggs per year. Eggs are used for feeding children up to the age
of 4. Adults get few eggs except at Easter and on feast days. . . . A majority
of the people have very little cheese. This is particularly serious since con-
sumption of meat is so low.*

262 In traveling over Greece, a foreign observer is struck by a number of
264 interesting and useful practices connected with food. The widespread use
of one-dish meals, most of them vegetable stews, economizes fuel and cook-
ing equipment and frees the women for other household and farm tasks.
Bread can be dipped into the stew sauce, serving a purpose quite apart
from its food value. Many families cook only one hot meal a day, starting
off with a cold breakfast except in the winter when they have a warm por-
ridge. Even though the climate during much of the year is warm, there is
251 no home refrigeration, very little canning of vegetables or fruits, but con-
siderable drying, brining, and pickling in order to conserve food for use
when it is out of season. Eggs, however, can be stored for several months
in water glass.

262 Various holidays have their traditional dishes, providing a festive occa-
[574] sion at which the Greek villager really gets enough to eat; at other times, he
[146] leaves the table hungry. A daily average of about 2500 calories per person
for the whole country is no fattening diet, although more healthful than one
in which individuals consistently overeat.

262 Regional variations in food habits throughout Greece depend upon the
184 local products available. Where the olive is not grown, but is obtained only
[146] through purchase or barter, the peasant usually has milk products such as
cheese or yoghurt. Where citrus fruit is lacking, more red peppers in the
bean stews provide vitamins. Within a community there are also differences
in diet based on differences in income.

252 Villages differ also in the day customarily set aside for baking bread in the
572 outdoor ovens. In a village such as Malakassa in Attica the women bake on
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242 help in the care of fruit trees that the provincial government had arranged to
178 plant on the highway near the village.

[245] The farmers are willing to try some variations if they can use the tech-
[875] niques they know and understand. Cotton prices had been low in 1958. In 1959,
[435] therefore, about four or five of Vasilika's farmers planted some of their cotton
[244] lands as melon patches, intending to sell the produce in Levadhia or in Athens.
[434] By 1961, they had gone back to raising cotton, because the experiment had
failed. One of Vasilika's farmers prefers to use his irrigated land as a truck
farm, and he and his son sell the produce in the surrounding villages. He argues
that with a vegetable crop the cash returns are faster and he incurs fewer debts.

Livestock

231 Each of the farm-owning households also maintains some animals. One
or two horses, a mule or a donkey, some five to twenty sheep, and one or two
goats constitute the range of livestock ownership for each household. The horses,
as we have seen, pull the plow and the cultivators in the fields. Together with
492 the mules and donkeys, they also serve as pack animals. The pack saddle of
231 wood and leather is of a design that has remained virtually unchanged from
Homeric times. It is used not only for carrying loads, but also for carrying
people who ride sidesaddle among the paths, through the fields, and between
the villages. Sidesaddle is the normal riding position for both men and women,
but in the spring, when the horses are let out to pasture on the hillside, the
young men of the village sometimes ride them home bareback, astride, gallop-
ing and whooping in what they call *kaonboi* fashion.

[552] The villagers do not give their animals individual names, and they take
no particular care to keep them physically comfortable. They will hitch them in
the shade of a tree in the fields if that is possible, but the farmers may not re-
move the saddles for an entire day. The animals are beaten with switches and
[865] kicked to make them work, and children are permitted to tease donkeys. Never-
theless, the villagers occasionally pat one of their beasts and sometimes encourage
children to kiss the ears of a horse and to feed it a lump of sugar.

233 Sheep, except for the lambs, are cared for by the shepherds. Of a hardy
[434] mountain breed capable of surviving the rigors of Greek pasturage and climate,
the sheep as milk and wool producers augment the food supply and sometimes
262 the cash of the farmers. Sheep milk is rarely drunk in liquid form, but yoghurt
233 and cheese are prepared from it. The white cheese is a staple of the villagers'
diet. They eat yoghurt less frequently and prepare it only as a special dish in
[272] milk season.

● [272] The villagers raise a special lamb each year to slaughter at Easter, but
[574] otherwise rarely eat lamb or mutton. They will consume a sheep that dies of
age or disease, and they slaughter sheep for some special occasion such as a
236 wedding, or someone's name day. At shearing time, wool is boiled in large
283 kettles, washed in the river, sent to town for carding, and then dyed and spun
into thread at home by the women.

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into thread at home by the women. In each household the women weave the rugs that are a necessary part of a girl's trousseau with wool from their own sheep—
at least as long as it lasts.

Goats are raised for their meat and, in households with young children, for their milk. Adults rarely drink the liquid milk. As a form of pasteurization, the villagers always bring the milk to a boil before serving it, and the children drink the milk while it is still warm. In the more prosperous households, the women use both sheep's and goat's milk as an ingredient for a kind of milk and egg custard pie and for a sweet milk and rice dish served with sugar and cinnamon. But these foods are in a class of special treats and are served mostly in spring and early summer when the milk supply is at its height. Goat meat, however, is often a less elegant substitute for lamb on special occasions. Kids are raised for the Christmas feast, and the measure of the success of a household's participation in the village's *paniyiri* (patron saints' day festival) is expressed by the number of animals (goats and sheep) slaughtered for the feast. The more visitors to the house, the more enjoyable the day is felt to be; the more visitors, of course, the more meat is eaten. When asked whether the *paniyiri* had been successful this year, one farmer answered, "Oh yes; we slaughtered three!"

Chickens are also an additional source of food and sometimes of income for the villagers. Families keep about a dozen fowl. They roam the house yards, (there is an effort made to keep them off the village street, and all hands join in shooing them out of the houses), and roost at night in the stone stables or in the ground-floor storeroom of the houses. The villagers like eggs, and eat them in various ways, but their production is also, of course, seasonal. The chicken is most significant for the part it plays in Greek village hospitality. The villagers will say, "Come to our house for a proper meal (*trapezi*). We'll kill a chicken for you." And that is quite literally what they do. Occasionally enough chicks survive to create a surplus from the household's point of view. Such poultry is sold to buyers who come around from the nearby towns. Chickens are rarely considered an extra source of food for ordinary household consumption.

A watchdog is a common addition to a household's collection of farm animals. The people of Vasilika believe that thievery is a constant danger to be guarded against and prefer, if possible, not to leave their household compounds totally unguarded. Whenever possible, some member of the household stays around the property even if it means sacrificing a visit to a feast at a neighboring village. If all the members of a household are out working in the fields, a dog is left at home. Ordinarily, however, dogs are tied up all day and the farmer, just before he goes to sleep, frees the dog to stand vigil through the night. Dogs are trained to bark at any unusual noise or at the approach of any person who is not a member of the household. The villagers, especially the women, are very much afraid of the dogs and consequently avoid going out at night. On one occasion, when the women and girls of the village had sat together in the church until long after dark, they set out for home with groups of neighbors clustered together, holding on to each other, walking fast, and shuddering and exclaiming with fear at the clamor made by the dogs. It should be added that in actuality, there are few thieves in the village and that the dogs rarely bite anyone.

villages the bread is brown and home-baked, and it may form the complete meal, with olive-oil for dipping. If there is any other food, there is only one dish, containing a variety of ingredients which usually make for balanced eating through the day. The hot bean dish (*fassoulada*) for example, contains olive-oil, parsley, onions, tomatoes, and other vegetables, and, eaten with brown bread and perhaps olives and cheese, provides a complete nutritive meal, except that the proteins are not animal ones; and the writer finds it fit for a king. The Greek meal is not structured climactically. It may end with fruit, or a leaf of lettuce, or cheese; this, however, is nothing to look forward to but, at most, puts a period to the meal. It is the bread, the "food", that is the point of the meal. Greeks in foreign parts, who have taken on rich foreign desserts, often top their meals with a bite of bread. [177]

In the provinces, very little meat is eaten. Through the week it is served, if at all, as a small ingredient part of one of the special vegetable dishes—dishes which are named after the main vegetable they contain. On Sundays, or when guests arrive, or on other festive occasions, there may be roast and potatoes; these are baked together and constitute the whole meal, with the ever-present bread. Fish is eaten in the villages wherever it is available. Processed fish—salted, dried, canned—is a great favourite, and salted roe, made into a "salad" is greatly enjoyed, and forms a regular item during Lent. Milk is consumed in the form of cheese and *yaourt*, a custard-like cultured milk; little is drunk. But the milk used is that of sheep and goats, which, according to Kaloyereas, is richer in fat and protein than cow's milk. In the villages, fruit and vegetables are eaten plentifully when in season; dried fruits and nuts are eaten, olives, cheese while it lasts, and a variety of legumes. There is skill in cooking, and since variety within a meal is not valued or demanded, the simple meals are much enjoyed, and wealthy emigrants, who have succumbed to the luxuries of the American meal pattern, often long for their peasant meals. [262]

In the cities, the Greeks have learned to eat meat and to drink more milk. Here cow's milk and a taste for it have been introduced, and in the country around Athens and Salonica, the peasants raise cattle. Foreign packaged goods are in vogue in the cities, and people, in their desire to take on American ways, eat foods which are contrary to all Greek principles of texture. Oatmeal is eaten by young children and invalids under one of its American trade names, Quaker Oats, pronounced unrecognizably. As *vromi*, it is food for animals, and the word is reminiscent of "stench". According to Dr. Katsigra, much foreign fruit is also imported, and this has led to a demand for perfection in the appearance of the Greek fruit eaten; this means that the Greek fruit for the city is now picked unripe. City people eat mostly white bread. In general, city food, which conforms in externals more closely to the list of the nutritionists, actually seems to be inferior to that of the provinces. And city health is reported to have been [269] [272] [231]